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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 GUATEMALA 003241

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: GUATEMALA: MILITARY CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: GUATEMALA 479

1. (U) Summary: The Guatemalan Ministry of Defense and the U.S Southern Command co-sponsored a December 7-10 conference in Antigua, Guatemala, to develop an action plan for the regional Human Rights Initiative (HRI) Consensus Document. Civilians worked alongside military officers to design a plan to systematize the Guatemalan military's observation of human rights in four key areas: civil-military relations; training and education; the human rights doctrine; and internal controls to prevent abuses. This initiation is off to such a good start, we are exploring how we might stand up a similar program for the police. End Summary.

2. (U) The HRI, which has been sponsored by SOUTHCOM since 1997, began with military officers from 33 countries and human rights NGOs working together to develop a regional model for military human rights programs, contained in the Consensus Document.⁸ Currently, SOUTHCOM provides support to the armed forces of those nations whose Ministries of Defense have decided to implement the Consensus Document. During an initial visit to Guatemala in February, SOUTHCOM and the OAS affiliated, San Jose-based Center for Education and Training for Human Rights (CECADH) pushed for implementation of the Consensus Agreement in Guatemala (reftel). The Guatemalan Defense Ministry and SOUTHCOM signed the Consensus Document on October 13 and scheduled the December 7-10 conference to develop a detailed working plan for implementation of the ideals encompassed by the agreement.

3. (U) Following opening remarks by the Ambassador and Guatemalan Vice President Stein, the conference began with the division of military and civil society attendees into working groups to hammer out meaningful performance goals and plans of action, as well as timelines for achieving each target outlined. Participants worked on four major issues: improving civil-military relations and interaction; training and educating the military on international principles of human rights and international humanitarian law; developing a human rights doctrine; and establishing internal controls to prevent future human rights abuses. The sixty conference participants included military officers from the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and representatives from COPREDEH (President's Commission on Human Rights), the Mack Foundation, and the Human Ombudsman's Office (PDH).

4. (U) Among numerous goals, the Guatemalan Defense Ministry committed to the following:

--- to implement regulations to assure that human rights violations are promptly reported to civil authorities;

--- to provide appropriate civil institutions full access to military documents and personnel files in investigations of human rights violations and to create an electronic database of such information to facilitate those investigations;

--- to hold workshops to provide human rights training and analyze cases of previous human rights violations and correct procedures;

--- to revise all military manuals and print 10,000 booklets with an updated human rights doctrine

--- to create a website to disseminate the human rights doctrine to all levels of military;

--- and to create a database to register military personnel convicted of human rights abuses.

5. (U) Comment: As the Ambassador noted in his remarks, human rights require constant vigilance. Though the Guatemalan military had a long history of disregard for human rights, the Defense Ministry's willingness to sign the Consensus Document, open the door further to civilian involvement, and work to develop clear guidelines for adherence to principles of human rights and international humanitarian law, signals another step in the right direction.

6. (SBU) Comment Continued: Currently, we observe far more human rights abuses and common crime committed by the National Civil Police (PNC) than the military. In fact, there have been no known human rights abuses committed by

military in recent years. Several PNC officers in attendance at the conference expressed interest to MILGP Commander in implementing the same type of training and internal controls that were developed during the SOUTHCOM event, a prospect we are exploring.

HAMILTON